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## OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM IN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY.<sup>1</sup>

BOTH Jewish Theology and Jewish Philosophy—if we may adopt the customary sub-division of what is in truth one essentially whole, however diversiform, subject—start with Deity. As M. Munk has observed, Jewish thinkers, unlike those of India and Greece, did not concern themselves with the science of being, or with a metaphysical conception of the universe. They took the stream of thought, or its constituent elements, a little lower down, and explored the origin of things as related to our actual world and to humanity. Their speculation, in other words, took the course of the sacred *Tetragrammaton* from its original root, the invisible elements of abstract existence, life, breath, etc., becoming gradually concentrated into a general personal name of Deity. Indeed, as the chief Jewish thinkers from Moses to Maimonides regarded the creation out of nothing as the starting-point of the universe, they could hardly have been expected to explore still further back. How non-being could become being was a problem which, however suited to Hegelian transcendentalism, was far beyond the reach of the simpler metaphysics of Jewish thinkers; while the inquiry, what the Creator was doing before the Creation, was one which, though they might not have answered with Augustine's sarcastic severity, they at least thought idle and impertinent.

Of the problem of Good and Evil the starting-point in Jewish philosophy is therefore the Creation—the creation out of nothing—the creation by one Almighty Beneficent

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<sup>1</sup> *Der Optimismus und Pessimismus in der Jüdischen Religionsphilosophie.* Von Dr. H. Goitein. Berlin: Mayer and Muller, 1890.

God—the creation pronounced to be in all its parts and products “very good.” By this, however, we do not intend to deny that some form of Polytheism may have been a prior stage of Jewish speculation, or that, given such an hypothesis, the problem of good and evil might not then have had a different and wider scope; but as we have no data for the determination of such an issue, the starting-point of the problem for us must, at any rate, be monotheistic. Not only does it owe its birth to monotheism, but the whole subsequent history of the question—every separate stage in its development—is clearly governed by the initial standpoint from which it proceeded.

The great question, then, of Jewish thought—the grand crux of its speculation from its earliest energising—was the problem of Good and Ill—the reconciliation of the undoubted evil of the world with its supposed original perfection. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil planted in the traditional Eden of Jewish antiquity has been the central tree in the broad and well-cultured field of all its subsequent speculation. As M. Munk well remarks: “Ce qui devait surtout préoccuper les sages des Hébreux, c'était l'existence du mal dans un monde émané de l'être qui est le Suprême Dieu” (*Mélanges*, etc., p. 462). This characteristically Jewish theme has just received in the learned and remarkable monograph of Dr. Goitein—the title of which heads this article—a fresh and interesting treatment. We feel bound to call our readers' attention to it, as well for the subject as for its treatment. No more attractive and stimulating book on Jewish Philosophy has appeared in recent years.

Briefly, Dr. Goitein's book may be described as a succinct account of the problem of Good and Evil in Jewish speculation, from the Book of Genesis to the time of Maimonides—from the traditional Moses the First to the historical Moses the Second. He starts with the primary fact in Old Testament theodicy—the Creation, with its consummated result of goodness and perfection. Such a starting-point

was essentially optimistic, and this must be regarded as the general tendency — perhaps even the root-thought — of Jewish speculation. That it was afterwards qualified, thwarted, and variously deflected by pessimism does not affect the fact of its originating impulse. The course of philosophical thought does not, any more than the course of any other human principle, always run smooth, whether in the individual or in history. Certainly no commencement of human speculation regarded as such could be fuller of fair promise than this. For the time being the human universe is an Eden, full of goodly trees and flowers and fruit. Unhappily the stage proves transient and delusive. The ideal of the first chapter of Genesis is destroyed by the reality of the third. A serpent, subtlest of all the beasts of the field, lies coiled beneath the trees and flowers of Eden. Like the growth of boyhood in Wordsworth's ode, the progress of Jewish thought soon becomes infected with pessimism. The childhood, once careless, joyous and buoyant, becomes gradually moody and clouded.

Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
Upon the growing boy.

Man's world proves to be not the abode of goodness, still less of optimistic perfection, except on the doubtful hypothesis that probation, deception, and failure are always good and desirable for its human denizens.

We need hardly say how often the problem thus enunciated, has been treated from every conceivable point of view, by thinkers of all ages and schools of thought. We do not, therefore, purpose to follow Dr. Goitein step by step through his lucid summary of the Biblical aspects of the question. Indeed, this portion of his treatise is confessedly only introductory to its main purpose, which is the consideration of the Problem of Good and Evil by mediæval Jewish thinkers, from Saadiah (892—942) to Maimonides (1135—1204).

We must, however, point out—what Dr. Goitein passes a little lightly over—that almost all the aspects and

issues of the problem find a place in the Old Testament and the Apocrypha. Indeed, the question is one which is hardly capable of indefinite discussion. Its main facts are so deeply graven on human experience and history, and present such a uniform character, that the theories necessary to account for them must needs be limited. The problem emerges, as we have seen, at an early period of Jewish speculation. We find, moreover, a growing interest in its discussion throughout this portion of Jewish Literature. The question is started in a tentative, hesitating kind of way in the Psalms, and is solved in a manner which, however natural and becoming, is not wholly in harmony with human experience. The remedy for fretting against the ungodly, viz., the persuasion that "he shall soon be cut down as the grass, and be withered as the green herb," is doubtless in complete accord with an optimistic and ethical view of Providence, but cannot claim to respond to the teachings of experience. Indeed, it is admitted to be insufficient almost as often as it is urged. The Book of Job may be defined as a philosophical drama dealing with this very question, which, however, it leaves, so far as a solution is concerned, unanswered. We should, perhaps, allow that the interest of the book is not confined to its main theme, its incidental bearings and issues being more important than its direct plot. Chiefly to be remarked is its acknowledgment of the disciplinary value of evil and temptation, and the consequent admission that they are permitted by God for that very purpose. Evil is also assigned to a power separate from and antagonistic to that of God's unthwarted will, though this is a conception which disappears when the real argument of the book begins. But the most remarkable incidental outcome of the book is its sanction—ostensibly by the Divine verdict—of Job's defiant attitude and of his forcible condemnation of the ways of God to man. In point of fact the book is—as Kant well observed—a consecration of free critical inquiry into the ways of Providence, as well as a

justification of suspense when the outcome of those ways is uncertain, and of ethical indignation when they seem to favour what is evil. Optimism and Pessimism are herein brought from the region of dogma and authoritative assertion into the arena of human experience and ratiocination. The final decision is left undetermined, though the fact that Job's uncompromisingly pessimistic utterances are approved by Deity rather than the optimistic commonplaces of his friends must be accepted as an impetus to the course of Pessimism which was never afterwards lost sight of in Jewish speculation.

Still more determinedly pessimistic is Koheleth. Here we find a view of human existence—its faculties, uses, and destiny, inexpressibly sombre and dreary, oftentimes verging upon despair. Providence in the sense of Ethical Government is wholly denied. Deity takes no more active or sympathetic interest in human concerns than if he were—like the Gods of Epicurus—far removed in serene aloofness from all things terrestrial. Good and evil men alike are left uncared for and unnoticed, without hope of reward, without dread of punishment. Only one issue for men of ordinary instincts and tendencies is conceivable under the circumstances, *i.e.*, the reckless pursuit of pleasure and indulgence of appetite, while even this is accompanied with the dread warning of a satiety more loathsome than even the misery of the degrading impulse. Here the passage from Optimism to extreme Pessimism in Jewish Thought is complete. Instead of the Creator's award on his creation, it might almost seem that Koheleth had arrived at an entirely opposite verdict. Dr. Goitein here points out—though he does not lay the stress on the point which its importance deserves—how the growing belief of the Jews in a future life—a belief which synchronises in its development with the gradual extinction of their terrestrial hopes—intensified the tendency to Pessimism. It is not sufficiently remembered that the notion of a Future existence, so far from destroying or

impeding the growth of Pessimism, is—we will not say the outcome—but a congruous and associate conception of a pessimistic estimate of man's present life and surroundings. Indeed, the conception and *raison d'être* of heaven and future blessedness is commonly defended by arguments based upon Pessimism, and this is, we may add, only one of several Pessimistic elements closely inwoven into the traditional dogma both of later Judaism and Christianity.

Coming to the Apocrypha, Dr. Goitein shows that the problem now begins to assume in its evolutionary course somewhat newer aspects, the general effect of which may be described as qualifying the extreme one-sided Pessimism, of which, *e.g.*, Koheleth is the exponent. The son of Sirach calls attention, for instance, to the relation of evil to human free-will—an important factor in the consideration of the question for the whole of its after development. He also insists on the purifying and strengthening influences of human trial and encounter with evil. His general conclusion is that, taken as a whole, the works of God must be pronounced to be good. A remarkable feature of the question at this stage of its progress was the result of the Hellenizing to which Jewish speculation at this period became exposed. The Greek denial of a future existence combined with what was its partial outcome, the disbelief of the Sadducees in the same doctrine, induced a reckless despair as to Providence, and the moral government of the Universe, as well as a practical Epicureanism which set at nought all distinction of good and evil. The effect of this Hellenizing in Jewish thought and usage is set forth in the first chapter of the First Book of Maccabees. It seems right to note this stage in the history of the question, because it was a reduction to practice of the unrestrained and cynical Hedonism advocated by Koheleth; but it must be remembered that in most questions of Jewish speculation Hellenization was a beneficent process, imparting breadth and variety to the discussion of opinions too exclusively dominated by theocratic and racial considerations. The

Apocryphal Book of Wisdom introduces a further and very important development of the question—one that has been adopted as its only possible solution by thinkers of varying races and creeds in every age of the world, *i.e.*, its dualistic or Manichæan solution. As the book is admittedly an outcome of Jewish Alexandrian philosophy, it is quite possible that this characteristic of it—like others of its features—may have its origin in Oriental sources.

And here we arrive at a very noted name in the history of this question—Philo of Alexandria.

Dr. Goitein has given four pages to the discussion of this great thinker, but he has not, in our judgment, sufficiently recognised Philo's importance in the development of the problem. For that matter, the great Alexandrian eclectic exercised an influence on subsequent Jewish speculation the extent of which has not yet been adequately estimated. He stands at the fountain head — though ante-dating it in respect of him—of that effort of mediæval Jewish philosophy which synchronises and corresponds with the method of the Motecallemin in Arab philosophy and of Scholasticism in Christian thought—a common energy which might be defined as the reconciliation of Faith, or Tradition, with reason. A Jew by birth, training and instincts, Philo was saturated with Gentile culture of every kind. He had explored—from the favourable stand-point of Alexandria, then the cosmopolitan centre of the world's wisdom—the religious systems of the Far East and the philosophies of Greece and Rome. He was fully conversant with all the methods and arguments that had been expounded by these various systems on the problem of good and evil. Add to this that the texture of his intellect, as well as his own inclination, pre-eminently qualified him for forming a cautious, many-sided, and carefully-balanced estimate of the whole problem. Few thinkers were more largely endowed than was Philo with broad eclectic sympathies ; few were more skilled in applying solvents and diluents to every kind of difficulty his varied research



brought before him. If, *e.g.*, a narrative or statement in the Hebrew records staggered his historical conscience, Allegory or Analogy was a potent agency for dissolving or neutralising its effect. If a doctrine or tradition made too great demands on human credulity, Philo's immense reading and many-sided ratiocination could suggest parallels and explanations which, if not wholly adequate, served to modify its *prima-facie* strangeness ; or if certain phenomena in the world conflicted with his sense of justice, he found little difficulty, by qualifying agencies of various kinds, to set aside or modify their ill effects. Great, indeed must have been the intellectual or moral dissonance which Philo could not convert into a fair semblance of harmony. Thus, on the problem of good and evil, his arguments and reflections are so varied and so potent, so judiciously disposed and speciously urged, that under his treatment the difficulties of the question seem almost to disappear. We must cull a few sentences on this part of our subject from Dr. Drummond's masterly monograph on Philo, especially as their Hellenic and philosophic tone is found largely reproduced by most subsequent Jewish thinkers who have discussed the question. Dr. Drummond is here analysing the second of Philo's treatises on *Providence* (vol. ii., p. 58).

The constantly-recurring arguments against Providence are mainly of two kinds. First, the existence of pain, which is inflicted by various natural agents, appears inconsistent with the supreme control of benevolent design. The violence of winds and rain, hail and snow, lightning, earthquakes and pestilence, wild beasts and noxious reptiles, inflict the most terrible calamities on mankind. In reply to this, several considerations are urged. First, in regard to the whole question of Providence, it must be remembered that the doctrine does not imply that God is the cause of everything ; of what is really evil, or, what lies outside the course of nature, God is no more the cause than the beneficent law by which a virtuous State is administered is the cause of the violence and rapine which spring from the wickedness of the inhabitants. Secondly, of these natural agencies which are occasionally attended by calamitous results, some, like wind and rain, were not intended for the ruin of sailors and farmers, but for the benefit of the whole human race, for they purify the earth

and air, and so contribute to the support of animals and plants ; and if a few suffer it is no wonder, for they are an insignificant portion of that entire class of men for whose benefit providence is exercised. Again, some infliction of pain may be necessary to ensure the safety of the entire system. The man who takes a just view will rejoice at whatever is done without moral evil, even if it do not conduce to pleasure, and will regard it as designed for the preservation of the universe. . . . . Another consideration is that some destructive agencies are only accidental consequences of the primary design. . . . . In the same manner earthquakes, pestilences, thunderbolts, and similar things, though said to be sent by God are not really so, for God is the cause of no evil whatever. The changes in the elements produce these things, not as primary works of nature, but as consequences which follow the necessary and primary works. . . . .

The suggestion of a moral purpose in pain leads to the second difficulty. If the world is righteously governed, why is pain distributed with such a startling neglect of moral considerations ? Why have the wicked an abundance of all good things, . . . . . while those who pursue wisdom and virtue are almost all poor, obscure, in a low position, without the means of support, etc., etc. ? Why have a Polyrates and a Dionysius everything that heart can wish, while a Socrates is done to death by the plots of a worthless wretch ? . . . . . The first answer is an attempt to limit the extent of the problem. It does not follow that if certain persons are esteemed good by us, they are really so, for the means of judgment possessed by God are more accurate than those enjoyed by the human mind. . . . . Then we must remember that Providence takes a comprehensive view, and that the righteous could not be exempt from suffering without altering the whole constitution of things, or suspending the laws of nature for individual benefit. Having mortal bodies, we are necessarily exposed to human troubles. Bad men may plot against the good. If we are in pestilential air, we must suffer from disease. If the wise man is exposed to the rain he will be wet ; in the north wind he will shiver, in summer he will be hot. Those who live in places where crime abounds must submit to the penalty, and all who brave the wintry seas accept an equality of risk. The good man readily acquiesces in this condition, for the things which the wicked prize are not the highest objects of human pursuit or the sources of real blessedness. . . . . The wise man desires not wealth and glory, but the acquisition of virtue, and to penetrate to the audience chamber of royal Reason."

It is obvious that the tendency of the above extracts is not only optimistic but determinedly so, nor is the con-

nection of the arguments with the philosophies of Plato and the Stoics less obvious. Indeed, we may accept it as a general rule that Jewish philosophical thought, though starting from optimistic sources, when limited to its own traditions, records, and resources, becomes mostly pessimistic, and it is only when this stage in its evolution becomes interpenetrated and enlarged by Gentile learning that we are able to discern decisively optimistic leanings.

Some proof of this proposition is afforded by the Talmud. Although that motley collection of writings abundantly betrays a knowledge of Gentile literature and culture of every possible kind, its real basis and native idiosyncrasy is indisputably Jewish. Now, the tone of the Talmud as to human existence, with its good and evil, is undoubtedly pessimistic. Dr. Goitein has collected a number of passages in support of this fact, but these form but a small part of the overt statements and indirect allusions which might have been adduced in its justification. Special causes might, no doubt, be alleged for this, the chiefest of them being the depressed condition of the Jews in various parts of the Diaspora, the contrast of this with their former national prosperity, and the perpetual disappointment of their Messianic hopes. Dr. Goitein reminds us that in the disputes between the schools of Shammai and Hillel, only one controversial point emerged, the solution of which throws a light on the status of the Jews of that time. The question really was whether "life was worth living," or, as the issue was actually put, whether non-existence was not preferable to existence. The problem was determined in a way which, while revealing the Jewish tendency to pessimism, discloses the sensitiveness of the people—so emphatically marked throughout the Talmud—to the *practical* exigencies of life "It were better for men not to have been born," was the sage decision; "but, inasmuch as man was born, the next best thing for him was to attain the highest possible reach of his ethical religious ideal," a conclusion which might be recommended to the Schopenhauers and von Hartmanns,

the Heines and Leopardis of our time, as a common sense reconciliation of the abstract truth of Pessimism with the noblest energies and aspirations of mankind—a conclusion which puts wholly to flight their favourite philosophy of despair.

Passing over the aspects which the question assumed under Christianity, together with the Gnostic and other sects related to or sprung from it—their solution of our problem being mostly dualistic—we now come to Dr. Goitein's main theme—the treatment of the question of good and evil by Jewish mediæval thinkers.

Dr. Goitein has selected his representative thinkers on this problem with much judgment. He begins with Saadiah, who may here claim to be described as a leader in the Judæo-Arab revolt against traditionalism, which commenced in the ninth century.<sup>1</sup> We need not remind our readers that our knowledge of this remarkable man has received many and important accessions during the last half-century. His position with reference to our subject has been elucidated, among other writers, by Dr. John Cohn, and especially by the translation which that eminent scholar has given of his *Commentary on the Book of Job*, published last year, and which is a considerable improvement on the well-known translation of Julius Fürst, published in 1845. In addition to the careful perusal of Saadiah's writings, Dr. Goitein seems to have explored every source of information open to him on the subject of Saadiah's teaching, the result being a useful and fairly exhaustive treatment, to which future scholars will find it hard to add much of importance.

Saadiah, as Dr. Goitein truly presents him, is a Rationalist of the freest and most outspoken kind.<sup>2</sup> He belongs, indeed, to that highest type of philosophy which, in purest fealty to truth, regards suspense on doubtful issues as

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Steinschneider, *Judische Literatur*; Ersch u. Grueber, sec. ii., vol. xxvii., p. 393. Sec. 11, Der Kampf der Wissenschaft und Haggada.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Frankel, *Zeitschrift*, iii., 404.

preferable to dogmatic determination. The chief cause of human error, he thinks, is the haste to dogmatise on dubious matters, which is, in philosophy, man's original sin. Saadiah's language on the subject reads almost like a translation of Thucydides' complaint, that men are always eager to accept ready-made opinion, instead of troubling themselves with independent investigation of truth. It is this unseemly haste to accept dogmas, perhaps unproved and unprovable, which leads men wrong, and, therefore, their error must be attributed, not to God, but to their own listlessness and ignorance. Dogma implies infallibility, but the man who desires to possess infallible certainty desires to be Deity, for only Deity possesses absolute, as distinct from acquired, knowledge. Saadiah likens ignorance to darkness; they are privative co-relatives of knowledge and light. Dr. Goitein, who is fully conversant with the general literature of his subject, is aware how largely this privative conception of evil was shared by the Christian fathers, as well as by philosophers in general. He points out that its adoption by Saadiah and similar thinkers was dictated by Monistic considerations, just as John Stuart Mill remarked that the conception of Satan and an independent sovereignty of evil was essentially Polytheistic. But Saadiah's Monotheism does not avail to save him from Pessimism of a type more or less akin to that of Koheleth. With the growth of human wisdom increases, *pari passu*, human sorrow, because the perversion and defects of things are more clearly discerned. The apportionment of good and evil seems to him unfair, the aggregate of human joy being more than counterbalanced by the totality of human sorrow. So essentially evil is this life that its final cause for the godly seems to be chiefly that it is a vestibule or ante-room to the life to come.

Saadiah, however, evades with considerable dexterity the natural outcome of his pessimism, *i.e.*, the incrimination of the Creator's omnipotence or goodness. His various methods of attempting this we have no space to detail.

His general plan is to shift the incidence of evil from the Creator to the creation, but he often has recourse to *à priori* reasoning. Thus he argues that the divine activity cannot be charged with injustice, because evil is caused by fear, or by desire, or by ignorance; but, inasmuch as God cannot be influenced by these, he cannot be charged with unrighteousness. The form of the argument is more significant than its substance. It is an example of a scholastic mode of ratiocination, which finds frequent analogies in the writings of Jewish and Arab thinkers of the time, and serves to prove how widely the methods of scholasticism governed all learned speculation during the Middle Ages.

Not a little of the difficulty surrounding the problem of human good and evil has been owing to the theory that the earth was the centre of the universe, so that man, its noblest denizen, became the final cause of all creation. In the youth of astronomy and geology the conception was plausible. What was true of the sun, moon and stars was, *à fortiori*, true of the productions of the earth. All things being estimated from a merely human standpoint, what seemed good for man thereby became good in itself. Similarly what was bad for man was regarded as inherently bad. Nothing could be simpler than such a human teleology, but it could have only one legitimate issue, viz., pessimism. Nor was this the worst of its results; it demanded a perpetual strain on the witness of reason or human experience. Maimonides, as we shall find, saw the difficulty, and rejected the theory which gave it birth, but Saadiah adopted it, and it forms a strong motive influence in the genesis of his pessimism.

The relation of human free-will to evil Saadiah interpreted in the only way which both preserves the divine justice, and harmonises with the facts of human existence. Like the Mutazilites in Islamism, he vigorously opposed the predestinationism which formed the first article both of faith and practice in the creed of the majority of Mahomet's followers, and made, during the Middle Ages, large and

repeated incursions into Jewish and Christian thought. No doubt the evil which results from human free-will must, in a world governed by divine omnipotence and goodness, assume a certain permissive aspect in relation to that government, and with all his determination to keep the Deity free from imputation of evil, Saadiah is compelled to allow this. Such evil is, however, permitted or ignored wholly for man's sake; it is an unavoidable result of God's goodness, or of man's freedom of choice. It can no more be ascribed to God than the outcome of any righteous act or beneficial law, which incidentally may have ill effects, can be ascribed to the *intention* of the doer or lawgiver. We are able, indeed, to see both here and elsewhere that Saadiah has the less scruple in allowing free scope to various human evils on account of his doctrine of a future compensatory existence.

Man, according to Saadiah, is not only free. It is his high prerogative to be endowed with reason, without which freedom would be only a snare. Human reason is a divine gift inherent in the race, and is both prior to, and independent of revelation. The function of revelation was not to abrogate or set aside man's own reasoning powers, but to supplement them. For example, revelation was not needed to teach men the difference between good and evil; that they would have attained without it. Its object was to *hasten* men's conception of it. Saadiah's standpoint in this particular resembles that of Raimunde of Sabieude, and his doctrine of the law of God being secondary to the law of nature. We may regard it as one method, among others, by which human reason, in Judaism and Christianity alike, attempted to break through the chains of the traditionalism and ecclesiasticism of the Middle Ages.

The extent of Saadiah's pessimism is in great part proved by his stress on future existence. In view of this final restoration of all things he has no difficulty in allowing and accounting for most of the inequalities and

perversions of justice to be found in the world. The pain and early death of children, *e.g.*, which Plato acknowledged to be an injustice needing rectification, Saadiah accounts for by the recompense of a future world. Dr. Goitein remarks on the additional difficulty of accounting for the sufferings of children which beset the creeds of Judaism and Islamism, by reason of their non-acceptance of the doctrine of original sin; and he is so far justified in connecting that doctrine with a disregard of children's ills inasmuch as those Christian divines who have held original sin most strongly, have also adopted the most inhuman theories as to their eternal doom. In contrast with the *decretum horribile* of Calvin and Augustine, it is refreshing to note Saadiah's milder judgment as to the fate of children even of wicked parents. Thus he maintains that the death of the Midianite children, and of those who perished in Noah's deluge—involved, as they were, in the wholesale destruction of their parents—can only be reconciled with justice by assuming their recompense in a future world. We may accept this plea on behalf of innocent sufferers, whose fate awakens little notice or sympathy among Christians, as a tribute to Saadiah's enlightened rationalism, or to his humane sympathies, or probably to both combined. Indeed, it would seem that Saadiah carried those qualities still further in the same direction, for, following the lead of the Mutazilites, who pursued the doctrine of future life compensations to unusual extremes, he held that dumb animals were entitled to a recompense in an after state for their manifold sufferings here.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This question was discussed by Proclus, *Ennead* iii. book ii. chap. xv., and answered by the supposed need of the continuous existence of carnivora. This is but another form of the poet's description of Nature:—

“So careful of the type she seems,  
So careless of the single life.”

The objections to this cheap solution are twofold—

1. The organisation of the carnivora might have been different, like that *e.g.* which Isaiah assigns them at the Messianic Millennium, when “the lion shall eat straw like the ox.”



It would be easy to point out inconsistencies in Saadiah's solution of the problem of Good and Evil. To name two instances :—in his effort to remove evil out of all relation to Deity he assigns it an independent existence. Thus when he says "Sin is not sinful because God has forbidden it, but God has forbidden it because it is sinful," the separate existence of evil is avowed, in contradiction to what he elsewhere urges as to its privative nature. Another contradiction of the same character is found in his doctrine of the Eternity of hell-torments. But with all deductions for incongruities, which, indeed, seem to be inherent in the nature of the subject, Saadiah's discussion of the problem may claim to be a fair and *bonâ-fide* attempt to grapple with a serious and difficult question. While he labours, in due fealty to the traditions of his creed, to preserve the Supreme Being from every direct impeachment of evil, or even of imperfection, he is not less sensible of the claims of all sentient beings on the divine justice and clemency. He is more impartial than some of his successors, less comprehensive than others ; but Dr. Goitein shows that he has a claim to be heard on this question, and our brief summary of his teaching seems sufficient to establish that claim.

The next thinker on Dr. Goitein's list is Joseph Ibn Zaddik (1070—1149), who deals with the question of Good and Evil in his ספר עולם הקטן *Book of (the) Microcosm*. Ibn Zaddik is as zealous as Saadiah in affirming the general perfection of the Universe, and preserving the Creator from every causal or direct relation with evil. Like Plato, he identifies Deity with *the good*, and seeks to prove

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2. The other objection may be suggested by Mrs. Browning's lines :—

"It had

Not much consoled the Mastodons to know  
Before they went to fossil, that anon  
Their form would quicken with the elephant;  
They were not elephants but Mastodons."

*Aurora Leigh.*

that the creation, as well as the moral law, is the outcome of goodness. His conception of the material world as an embodiment of goodness seems to have the effect of making him ignore its material ill; he is more awake to the human evil which results from man's free will and its relation to the Creation and the original significance of the Universe. Man's chief faculty is, however, not volition in itself, but volition regarded as a part of his reasoning energy. It is this that constitutes his supremest power. The perfection of man's reasoning energy, compared with his other intellectual faculties, Ibn Zaddik ascribes to the theory (related to if not derived from Neo-Platonism) that the material (stuff) of the reasoning soul is a pure "light-stuff" (one is reminded of the "mind-stuff" of the late Professor Clifford), which came immediately out of the hand of the Creator. The defects of our sublunary world in opposition to the Reason world, עולם השכל, are rendered possible because they are attributable, though only indirectly, to God. Evil has its source in the defect and incapacity of the human or other created agents to realise the perfection designed by the Creator. This incapacity, which is infinitely varied, has, however, its use. It is the cause of the manifoldness of created things, which contributes to the beauty of the whole—a thought which Ibn Zaddik may have derived either from the Stoics or the Neo-Platonists. The relation of the Divine Prescience to moral evil he explains in the usual way by denying to the foreknowledge any compulsory effect. He makes one luminous contribution to the solution of the problem by maintaining that the highest good of man is not to be sought for nor found in Happiness. He finds it in the training of man's intellect towards perfection—in the pure knowledge of the primary source of all things—which is man's noblest intellectual and spiritual achievement. Without a *philosophical* knowledge of God, men, spite of their good deeds, are mere idolaters. Wisdom is the only source of goodness, and man was created that he might attain wisdom. This moral

principle, which Dr. Goitein labels *geistesaristokratisch*, stands in close relation with Ibn Zaddik's pessimistic estimate of life, according to which all happiness is in its very nature illusory. Pain is inseparable from pleasure, which is, indeed, only a temporary cessation of pain. Pleasure or happiness cannot, therefore, be the supreme good, to which, indeed, it bears no direct relation. This life is only of use so far as it is an entrance-porch to the life beyond. The effort of the wise man should be directed to despising, denying, and trampling on this life, for when a man comes to know what this world is he will hate it, and strive only for the life to come.

With this estimate of human life Ibn Zaddik has little concern in reconciling discrepancies between virtue and happiness. In his creed virtue—by that understanding self-abnegation, and asceticism—is in part its own reward, and partly is the virtuous man's title to future blessedness. The mode of future retribution we, as sensuous beings, cannot comprehend. It does not admit of our conceptions even of space and time, and is hence, as Dr. Goitein truly remarks, akin to the Buddhist Nirvana.

Ibn Zaddik's teachings are evidently similar, as Dr. Goitein admits, to those of the Neo-Platonists in ancient, and of Schopenhauer in modern times. As we have seen, he unites an optimistic estimate of the design of the world from the standpoint of the Creator, with a pessimistic view of human life. In this he resembles not a few Christian, as well as various Jewish and other Gentile thinkers. The incongruity of such a theory will always pertain to every scheme of thought which makes a chasm between theology, and, in its highest sense, anthropology.

Both Saadiah and Ibn Zaddik were largely influenced in their consideration of the problem of Good and Evil by Gentile philosophers; one main characteristic of Jehuda Halevi, the poet philosopher—who occurs next on Dr. Goitein's list—is that he takes up an attitude of antagonism against non-Jewish culture. He considers the question

from the standpoint of Revelation. But his method is fundamentally sceptical in the sense that the thought of Montaigne, Bishop Huet, and so many more, is sceptical. Human reason is regarded as absolutely weak and helpless, and can attain to no truth except by divine aid. Such is Jehuda Halevi's theory; in practice, however, he is compelled to allow a certain discriminating power to reason, for "both the articles of the Jewish creed and the precepts of the law contain much that transcends man's reason, but nothing wholly opposed to it." Hence any apparent defects in the rule of the Universe must be ascribed not to the Creator's defective wisdom, but to man's defective vision. So far, the teleology of Jehuda Halevi hardly rises above the level of commonplace. Much of it is of the same kind as, *e.g.*, Paley's *Natural Theology*, but in his reconciliation of his starting point with the facts of nature or human history, he develops some interesting speculation. Thus, while insisting on the obvious meaning of the lion's teeth and claws, and the spider's web, he cannot shut out the other aspects of those instruments. "Is it right," he asks, "that the hare should serve as food to the hyæna, and the fly to the spider?" And can we legitimately ascribe to Deity as just what our conscience pronounces unjust? At this point, however, he falls back on the innate feebleness of the human reason, which, of course, peremptorily decides not only this, but any similar objection.

But with all his effort to limit the rule of the Universe to the direct causation of God, Jehuda Halevi cannot avoid recognising phenomena which cannot thus be accounted for. These he ascribes (i.) to the free play of chance, in the operations of Nature; (ii.) to the original constitution of formless matter, from which all physical forms are derived. He seems aware that these independent entities involve a dualism in relation to the government of the world, but acquiesces in an explanation which, if not inevitable, is the best which the frailty of the Reason has to offer. To the unlimited

potentialities of matter, and the manifold operations of nature, he ascribes the variety discernible in the Universe, but these he considers, like Ibn Zaddik, to add to the beauty of Nature regarded as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

We have already noticed incidentally how the seeming defects in the government of the world were emphasized for Jewish thinkers by the dispersed and down-trodden condition of the chosen people. This is the especial example of injustice which prompts and sustains Jehuda Halevi's pessimism. He, however, manifests considerable skill in finding arguments and analogies which permit him to infer a glorious and retributive future for his people in the advent of the Messiah.

Dr. Goitein points out anew the significance of Jehuda Halevi as a thinker who resolutely opposed himself to extra-Jewish culture at the very time when Arab philosophy was prostrating itself more and more abjectly before the shrine of mediæval Aristotelianism. His successor in Dr. Goitein's list illustrates the influence of Aristotelianism in Jewish thought. Abraham Ibn Daud, of Toledo (1110-1180), considers the problem of evil not from the standpoint of Jewish scripture or tradition, but from that of the Stagirite—in other words from the general point of view of the later Greek Philosophy.

The speculations of Ibn Daud on our subject need not detain us long. Starting from a Hellenic rather than from a Jewish standpoint, he is not anxious to preserve the Divine goodness and omnipotence by an implied denial of evil. On the other hand, he regards evil, especially material evil, as a positive, pronounced and unquestionable fact. At the same time it must not be ascribed to Deity. Its true source is matter—original formless matter—which he defines, in true Aristotelian fashion, as the potentiality or

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<sup>1</sup> That creative energy cannot be conceived without manifoldness is, it may be pointed out, a favourite thought of Goethe, and occurs repeatedly in his works. Cf. *e.g.* *Wahrheit und Dichtung* Book viii., and the "Prolog im Himmel" of *Faust*.

possibility of existence. Imperfection may therefore be a growth or effort towards perfection; in other words, evil may be good *in the making*. Indeed, there is a struggle—a *nisus* in all imperfect beings—not for mere existence, but for higher existence—for the realization of their several potentialities—in St. Paul's words: "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain." At the same time the Creator did not intend that all beings should alike arrive at their highest development; that all plants, *e.g.*, should become animals, all animals should become men, and all men angels. In such a case Nature would suffer from a surplusage of goodnesses (*Ueberfülle ihrer Güter*), and perish piecemeal as a thing that is over-ripe. It is to the infinite variety in the final attainments of created beings that we must ascribe the manifoldness which constitutes so much of the beauty of Nature regarded as a whole. Dr. Goitein reminds us that the same idea is found in Greek (Plato), Arabic (Ibn Sina), and modern (Spinoza) philosophy. Accepting this hypothesis, Ibn Daud has no difficulty in contending that the aggregate of evil is less than the whole sum of good, and that what may appear evil, considered in itself, may claim to be accounted a good, when regarded relatively to the whole creation. Besides, man possesses by means of his free will a power to ward off, or even turn to good, the evil by which he is personally affected, so that even his incidental personal evil may be merged and lost in the sum-total of his lot.

It is instructive to trace how Aristotle's principles and method govern the whole of Ibn Daud's thought. He proves, *e.g.*—in exact contradiction to the traditional thought of his co-religionists—that God could not be the author of good and of evil, because two opposite predicates could not be ascribed to the same subject. So when he speaks of the properties of various evils, vices, etc., he regards them as privative deflections from their true standard; in other words, his method has obvious reference to the Nicomachean Ethics and the doctrine of the Mean.

The general result of Ibn Daud's teaching on our subject may be defined as a qualified optimism, the nature and scope of which seems fairly described by Dr. Goitein, "The world is as good and perfect as the nature of its matter permits it to be."

With Maimonides—the glory of Jewish speculation in the Middle Ages—Dr. Goitein arrives at ground more widely known and better cultivated. Moses Maimonides has, indeed, long passed from the domain of Jewish thought to the larger arena of European philosophy, and it involves no detraction from Dr. Goitein's clear and able treatment of him to say that he is not able to add much to our existing knowledge of that great thinker's speculation on the good and evil of the Universe.

Maimonides is characterised in this as in all his thought by comprehensiveness of scope, immensity of erudition and a luminous, well-balanced intellectual method. The problem, as he regards it, forms a part of the general moral phenomena of the Universe—the relation of man to his environment; in other words, to that varied collection of processes and facts which we collectively designate under the term Providence. It is connected with the Creator and the nature (*ex nihilo*) of his creation; it has close affinities with the data of consciousness and the experimental fact of man's free-will; it has relations to other sentient beings besides man; it includes the probabilities or potentialities of other planets and heavenly bodies besides our own. The problem must be elevated above the mere human and terrestrial standpoint from which it has mostly been contemplated; it must be considered and decided, so far as possible, in all its bearings and applications, not by a selected and exclusive few. He, therefore, brings to bear on the question all the resources of his encyclopædic learning. With the testimony of the Jewish canonical writings and the commentaries of the Rabbis he joins the evidence of the Greeks, especially of Plato and Aristotle, and the philosophic culture of the

Arabs. The general conclusion at which he arrives on the question of good and evil may be again defined as a qualified Optimism. His theory of creation *ex nihilo* deprives matter of the independence and eternity claimed for it by Aristotelians, but implies a certain amount of permissive agency. This, however, is discounted by the assumption that evil, in the metaphysical sense of the word, is only relative and privative. Existence is the unessential characteristic of Deity; non-existence, on the other hand, constitutes the very *being*, if the paradox be allowed, of evil. This theory is not an unusual one. It has formed a feature of more than one prominent Theodicy. Perhaps its most remarkable expression in modern times is that given it in Goethe's *Faust*, where Mephistopheles declares his nature:—

“So ist denn alles, was ihr Sünde,  
Zerstörung, kurz das Böse nennt,  
Mein eigentliches Element.”

Maimonides endeavours to found it on the celebrated text, Isaiah xlv. 7, “I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil,” where the two verbs create are forms of ברא which most Jewish philologists, at least of a former day, agreed to accept as implying a creation out of nothing. The evil that pertains to material and terrestrial things is thus in its nature privative and accidental; it cannot be predicated of spiritual beings and worlds in other portions of the Universe. And this argument brings us to one of the most striking features of the the great thinker's treatment of this subject. No one who has given the least attention to the question can have failed to notice how much a rational solution of it has been hampered by the theory that man is the sole final cause of the whole creation. Maimonides rejects this petty teleology wholly and decisively. Just as he refuses to limit the scope of the problem to man, as if there were no other sentient beings on the earth or in other parts of the Universe, so he distinctly varies the issue as to the relation of the earth to the planets or other stellar bodies. Writing



some centuries before the Copernican theory had equalised the relation of the earth with its fellow planets, his opinions have a prescient significance. He seizes the astronomical aspect of terrestrial phenomena with much of the dexterity and cosmic enthusiasm of Giordano Bruno. Our sublunar world may probably be the sole birthplace and abode of evil, and the stars may haply be designed as the abodes of spirits of varying degrees of perfection, or as homes of retribution for earth-born mortals. Dr. Goitein compares on this point some verses of Haller's poem, "Ueber den Ursprung des Uebels," a translation of which we subjoin:—

Perchance this earth of ours—a grain of tiniest sand  
That floats in the ocean of heaven—is Evil's Fatherland ;  
The stars, mayhap, are abodes of souls translumed to light ;  
And as here injustice reigns, there sways the rule of right.  
Thus we who have learned the world from this earth-atom small,  
Judge but by a fragment torn from its place in the mighty All."

It is obvious how much of the whole ground of the problem is covered by this rational standpoint, and how many of its incidental difficulties disappear by its application. As man is not the sole end of the creation, so the object of human existence—man's *summum bonum*—is not the gratification of the senses, nor the possession of earthly blessings, but the perfecting of his spirit—the knowledge of God, and the love of God which proceeds from that knowledge. It is the intelligence or human reason that forms the connecting link between God and men, and it is this higher knowledge that is the guarantee of man's immortality.

The doctrine of Providence as enunciated by Maimonides is similarly based upon rational principles, and has a decidedly lofty and ennobling character. It may be briefly described as the interdependence and reciprocal connection of the world-reason on the one hand and the human reason on the other, which connection is the closer the more perfect the individual reason may be. According

to this theory the man whose reason abides continually with God enjoys his unceasing protection. Prophets and righteous men are never beset by misfortune, except when apart from God, and the greatness of their trouble stands in a direct relation with the duration of their God-forgetfulness, and the unworthiness of the earthly object to which they surrendered themselves. . . . The special Providence which frees men from the sea of chance is the effect of that spiritual connection. The righteous sometimes lose this, the wicked have never shared it. It hardly needs pointing out that this conception of the rôle of Providence does not differ from that maintained by Job's friends; but as Dr. Goitein shows, this stress of Maimonides on misfortune as a material objective fact is elsewhere qualified, as in his criticisms on the Book of Job, by the more reasonable hypothesis that the evil is especially subjective and spiritual, in harmony with the Stoic principle that material evil as such cannot affect the good man.

In contrast with his predecessors among Jewish thinkers, the alleged disproportion between virtue and happiness does not come to the front in Maimonides' speculation. Dr. Goitein, with his usual insight, points out how his ignoring of any such issue agrees with his doctrine of the Divine attributes; for if no positive qualities can be ascribed to Deity, or if his alleged goodness and righteousness differ from those of men not only in degree but in kind, the misfortunes of the godly, nay, even the existence of evil itself, cannot come into contradiction with these attributes. It must be admitted on the whole, that with all his confessed breadth of view and his desire to exonerate the Creator from the partial perfection or positive evil of his creation, Maimonides is not successful in an attempt which will probably always transcend human effort. Dr. Goitein summarily asserts that "he falls on the one side into an ethical and practical Pessimism, and on the other into a metaphysical Dualism," and few who have gone over with critical insight the ground of the *Guide to the Perplexed*,

or Dr. Goitein's own luminous epitome of his teachings, will venture to question that verdict.

Our space is, however, exhausted, and we have only room for a few general remarks on Dr. Goitein's very able, and, so far as we have been able to test it, wholly trustworthy monograph. He seems to us to have raised a literary memorial of unquestionable value to the breadth, profundity and general high worth of Jewish mediæval speculation. Though the ostensible theme is the question of Optimism and Pessimism, it is, while peculiarly a Jewish theme, one that has manifold side issues and ramifications into other departments of philosophical theology. Every reader of Dr. Goitein will be prepared to admit that, many-sided as the question is, it is not more so than the attempts of mediæval Jewish thinkers to arrive at its solution. Unlike Buddhism, Islamism, or Zoroastrianism, Jewish speculation recognises *every* aspect of the problem. This is at once a proof of its comprehensiveness and of its profundity. Perhaps we may say that no other qualities than these are commensurate with the nature of the question. The Universe, with its myriad-fold aspects and qualities, does not readily lend itself to an exclusive Optimism, to a one-sided Pessimism, nor even to a dogmatic and definitive estimate of their relative proportions. Dr. Goitein's work has thus a twofold utility. In addition to its historical and expository value, it incidentally sets forth the only fair method of treating a subject of profoundest interest to humanity. The maudlin disciples of despair, to whom the one-sided pessimism of Schopenhauer and Von Hartmann has given birth, will find in Dr. Goitein's book an antidote, if not altogether to their conclusions, at least to their feeble, short-sighted and wholly unphilosophical methods of arriving at them.

JOHN OWEN.